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STUDIES IN ANTIQUITY & CHRISTIANITY

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# Ascetics, Society, and the Desert

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*Studies in  
Early Egyptian  
Monasticism*

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## The Origins of Monasticism

In an article published twenty-five years ago on "The Quest for the 'Origins' of Religion," Mircea Eliade began by citing the French proverb *Il n'y a que les détails qui comptent* (Only the details are really important). He used the proverb to observe that "there are instances in the history of culture when details are unexpectedly illuminating."<sup>1</sup> When one narrows the focus from the history of culture to the history of early Christian monasticism, the validity of Eliade's observation remains. Consideration of the details has, in fact, proven to be not only illuminating, but essential to a proper understanding of the subject; for when the details are forgotten or ignored, the origins and development of Christian monasticism are traced down oversimplified and erroneous paths.

The views of Antony as the first monk and of Egypt as the source from which his innovation and its developments spread throughout the rest of Christendom, views still often found in basic accounts of Christian history,<sup>2</sup> are prime examples of such oversimplified and erroneous conclusions. Clean and simple as this "big bang" theory of monastic origins is, the details fail to support it. It is dependent on the selective use of mainstream Greek and Latin sources and as such betrays its foundation in and support of a Western "orthodox" view of history. When the net is cast more widely and the sources read more carefully, the nearsightedness of the theory becomes apparent. The *Life of Antony* itself mentions his predecessors.<sup>3</sup> Syriac scholars have established the independent origin and devel-

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1. Eliade, "Quest "

2. Roland H. Bainton, *Christendom: A Short History of Christianity and Its Impact on Western Civilization* (2 vols ; New York: Harper & Row, 1964) 1 104–5; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985) 110–12.

3. *Vita Antonii* 3 (PG 26.843–44); see discussion below

opment of monasticism in the Syrian province,<sup>4</sup> and recent evidence has called the "orthodox" origin of certain monastic developments into question.<sup>5</sup>

The tendency toward theoretical oversimplification is controlled by remembering the importance of the details. What follows is neither an exhaustive treatment of early Christian monasticism nor yet another quest for its "origins,"<sup>6</sup> but rather an introductory tour through the details of selected sources. It is a tour designed both to reveal the diversity in the "origins and development" of early Christian monasticism and to underscore the impact of Western historiography on its interpretation.

#### THE EVIDENCE OF EUSEBIUS

Eusebius of Caesarea, in Book 2 of his *Ecclesiastical History*, offers an example of the perfect union of the proclamation of the gospel with the undertaking of an ascetic life. He reports that when Mark preached the gospel in Egypt,<sup>7</sup> "the number of men and women who were there converted at the first attempt was so great, and their asceticism was so extraordinarily philosophic, that Philo thought it right to describe their conduct and assemblies and meals and all the rest of their manner of life."<sup>8</sup> The account of the Therapeutae, a Jewish ascetic community situated above Lake Mareotis in Egypt, which follows, is drawn directly from Philo Judaeus's *On the Con-*

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4. A. Vööbus, *A History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient: A Contribution to the History of Culture in the Near East* (2 vols.; CSCO 184, 197; Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1958–60); S. Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen* 20 (1973) 1–19; Price, *History*, xvii–xxiii.

5. On the relationship between the Pachomian monastic movement and the Nag Hammadi Library, see Goehring, "New Frontiers," 236–52 (chap. 8 in the present volume), and Veilleux, "Monasticism and Gnosis." On the significance of the Manichaean influence, see Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1981) 195, and Koenen, "Manichäische Mission."

6. The quest for "origins" occurred in diverse fields in the nineteenth century and as such has been shown to be a product of Western historiography (Eliade, "Quest").

7. Birger A. Pearson, "Earliest Christianity in Egypt: Some Observations," in Pearson and Goehring, *Roots*, 132–59.

8. *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.16; translation from Kirsopp Lake, J. E. L. Oulton, and H. J. Lawlor, *Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History* (LCL; 2 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926) 1.145.

*templative Life*<sup>9</sup> Eusebius's identification of this Jewish community as Christian is clearly in error, though his belief that they were Christian betrays his view of the immediacy of the ascetic demand in the Christian call. The evidence should neither be used to support Eusebius's knowledge of "organized monastic communities in Palestine" before 300 C.E.,<sup>10</sup> nor to argue, since he elsewhere mentions no known Christian communities, that such communities did not yet exist.<sup>11</sup> Rather, Christian belief and ascetic practice were so closely connected in Eusebius's theology<sup>12</sup> that the identification of the Therapeutae as Christian seemed only natural to him. The naturalness of the equation is apparent in the fact that some scholars have chosen to discount the Philonic authorship of *On the Contemplative Life* rather than the Christian status of the Therapeutae.<sup>13</sup>

Eusebius's placing of this material near the beginning of his history establishes an origin for the ascetic life very early in the spread of the gospel.<sup>14</sup> The demand of an ascetic life lived in separation from the world is, through this account, made part of the earliest impulse of Christian existence and interestingly linked to Egypt. This treatment reveals in the case of Eusebius not so much a quest for the origins of monasticism nor even evidence of a specific knowledge of it, but rather the impact of his theology on his understanding of history. The elite ascetic life, a life above nature and beyond common human living,<sup>15</sup> is so central to his understanding of Christianity that it pushes itself back into his recovery of Christianity's formative years. If the origins are not understood or known, they are in a sense "mythically" created in the beginning with the gospel.

Beyond this most obvious example of a monastic life in Euse-

9. Leopold Cohn and Paul Wendland, eds., *Philonis opera quae supersunt* (7 vols. in 8; Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1896–1930) vol. 4; F. H. Colson, *Philo* (10 vols.; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967) 9:113–69.

10. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 195.

11. Hermann Weingarten, "Der Ursprung des Mönchtums im nachconstantinischen Zeitalter," *ZKG* 1 (1877) 6–10.

12. Eusebius, *Demonstratio evangelica* 1.8; Brown, *Body and Society*, 205.

13. Joseph Juste Scalinger, *De emendatione temporum* (Francofurti: I. Wechelium, 1593); Ernst Lucius, *Die Therapeuten und ihre Stellung in der Geschichte der Askese: Eine kritische Untersuchung der Schrift "De vita contemplativa"* (Strasbourg: Schmidt, 1879).

14. On the order of the material in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, see Robert M. Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). Philo's account of the Therapeutae is examined on pages 72–76 of Grant's work.

15. Eusebius, *Demonstratio evangelica* 1.8.

bis's *Ecclesiastical History*, one finds little evidence for a particular lifestyle defined as ascetic. There are numerous ascetic individuals who lead ascetic lives, but there is no individual or pattern that is established as an archetype that one should follow. Physical withdrawal (ἀναχώρησις) from the world, which became so central to the definition of monasticism through the later *Life of Antony*, is represented in Eusebius, but it is neither a prerequisite for the ascetic life nor is it indicative solely of the ascetic individual. He reports that Narcissus, the bishop of Jerusalem, escaped from the church to practice his "philosophic life" by retiring "secretly in deserts and obscure parts of the country,"<sup>16</sup> and that Clement of Alexandria had to seek Pantaenus out from his concealment in Egypt (ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ θηράσας λεληθότα).<sup>17</sup> Yet Origen, whose ascetic life is recorded in detail by Eusebius, practiced his "most philosophic manner of life" as a teacher, a profession that necessitated his presence in the world rather than his physical withdrawal from it. Eusebius reports that Origen astounded his followers by the severity of his ascetic labors. He disciplined himself in fasting, limited his sleep, which he took on the floor, persevered in cold and nakedness, embraced extreme limits of poverty, walked without shoes, and abstained from wine and all but necessary food. Following the gospel precept, he even made himself a eunuch for the kingdom of God.<sup>18</sup> This ultimate act of ascetic renunciation was undertaken, according to Eusebius, precisely because of Origen's presence within the world, so "that he might prevent all suspicion of shameful slander on the part of unbelievers (for, young as he was, he used to discourse on divine things with women as well as men)."<sup>19</sup>

Likewise Eusebius knows that many fled to the desert and mountains not to practice the ascetic life, but to avoid persecution. Unlike Jerome,<sup>20</sup> he does not link, through the commonality of the desert, the flight of early Christians to avoid persecution with the withdrawal of the later Christians as desert ascetics. He rather saw such

16. *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.9.6–6.10.1

17. *Historia ecclesiastica* 5.11.4

18. *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.3.9–13; 6.8.1–3

19. *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.8.2. Translation from Lake, Oulton, and Lawlor, *Eusebius*, 2.29

20. *Vita Pauli* (PL 23 17–30); Heussi, *Ursprung*, 70; Chitty, *Desert a City*, 6–7.

flight as but another form of persecution that resulted in their death "by hunger and thirst and frost and diseases and robbers and wild beasts."<sup>21</sup> The later understanding of the monk as the latter-day martyr is contradicted in Eusebius in the account of Alcibiades, who, though he had led a very austere life, was dissuaded by fellow Christians in jail from his ascetic practices before his martyrdom.<sup>22</sup> Rather than a picture of asceticism replacing martyrdom, one finds presented here the suggestion that persecution could hinder or even curtail the ascetic life.

Retreat to the desert has its origin for Eusebius not in the enforced flight of the persecuted, but in the voluntary search for solitude of the philosophical elite.<sup>23</sup> In joining together the powers of Christianity and Rome, he presented Christianity as the new philosophy which demanded among its elite practitioners an ascetic life. The life of renunciation is in fact the new "philosophic way of life" (βίος φιλόσοφος).<sup>24</sup> While this life may be perfected by martyrdom, it precedes the martyr's call.<sup>25</sup> While Eusebius might admit that some desert ascetics discovered the value of solitary life in the desert as a result of their flight from persecution, he certainly does not find in them the origin of the monastic life.

For Eusebius, the ascetic life cannot be an accidental discovery. Viewed as the elite form of Christian existence, it is the highest demonstration of the gospel. As the pre-Christian philosophers logically led an ascetic life, so the new Christian elite, e.g., Origen and Narcissus, knowingly undertook a philosophic life, by which Eusebius means Christian teaching and ascetic practice. While the dogma shifted from Plato to Christ, the ascetic lifestyle remained the same.

For the historical origins of monasticism proper Eusebius offers little evidence. His linkage of ascetic practice to the philosophic life, while undoubtedly accurate in a broader sense for the intellectual

21. *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.42.2.

22. *Historia ecclesiastica* 5.3.1-3.

23. Eusebius posits two ways of life given by the Lord to his church: that of the married Christian and that of the elite, who, in their ascetic life, live beyond or above human nature. *Demonstratio evangelica* 1.8; Brown, *Body and Society*, 205.

24. *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.3.9, 13; 6.9.6; 6.10.1. The same definition of the ascetic life as a practice of philosophy is found throughout Theodoret of Cyrillus's *Historia religiosa*. P. Canivet and A. Leroy-Molinghen, eds., *Théodore de Cyr: Histoire des Moines de Syrie* (SC 234, 257; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1977-79); Price, *History*.

25. *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.3.13.

elite, does not explain the rapid swelling of the monastic ranks in the late third and early fourth centuries by individuals of lower social and intellectual status both within the geographical boundaries of Greek culture and beyond. His portrayal is that of a Greek intellectual and represents a philosophically elite, Hellenocentric view of monastic development.

### THE LIFE OF ANTONY

The literary source most often turned to first to explicate the origins of monasticism among the common people is the *Life of Antony*.<sup>26</sup> According to the author of this heroic *Vita*, Antony, after the death of his parents, turned to the ascetic life when he heard in church the call of the gospel, "If you will be perfect, go sell all that you have and give to the poor; and come, follow me and you will have treasures in heaven" (Matt. 19:21). About twenty years old at the time, he gave his inheritance away and began his ascetic career in the vicinity of his village. His subsequent successes in the solitary life led to his ever increasing fame as a holy man, which in turn necessitated his withdrawal to ever more remote desert locations in order to regain his lost solitude. From his first village retreat he soon withdrew to more distant tombs, where he struggled with demons and continued to be visited by old acquaintances.<sup>27</sup> At age thirty-five he withdrew further into the desert of Pispis to a deserted fort where he continued to practice the ascetic life by himself for twenty years. Again his friends came to visit him.<sup>28</sup> In the years that followed, his fame became so great that the many who came to imitate his life eventually broke down the door of his abode to get at him. We are told that when he came forth, he appeared "as one initiated into sacred mysteries and filled with the spirit of God." He had conquered the demands of human life, for his body, in spite of the fastings and struggles, appeared the same as it had been before his withdrawal.<sup>29</sup>

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26. PG 26.823–896; G. J. M. Bartelink, *Athanasie d'Alexandrie: Vie d'Antoine* (SC 400; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1994); English translations in Robert I. Meyer, *St Athanasius: The Life of Saint Antony* (ACW; New York: Newman Press, 1950); Gregg, *Life of Antony*

27. *Vita Antonii* 2–8 (PG 26.841–856).

28. *Vita Antonii* 10–13 (PG 26.859–864).

29. *Vita Antonii* 14 (PG 26.863–866).

Many then came to Antony and were taught by him until once again the pressures became too great. In search of the ever fleeting solitude he desired, he set out on a journey to the Upper Thebaid and established his final abode near the Red Sea at the Inner Mountain (modern Deir Anba Antonius).<sup>30</sup> Here too, of course, his solitude could not be maintained as his fame and influence in matters of ascetic practice and Christian theology continued to grow.

Antony became, through this account, the most famous practitioner of the ascetic life. Much as Paul had become the apostle to the Gentiles par excellence through the fact that he was the most influential if not the first, so too Antony became the monk par excellence. His status as such easily translated into a view of his undertaking as innovative and original. He became not only the monk par excellence, but also the first monk from whom all subsequent developments flowed. From the eremitic life of Antony came the coenobitic innovation of Pachomius, and from these springs in Egypt flowed the monastic rivers that watered Palestine and Syria, Rome and the West.

To base a theory of monastic origins and development on the *Life of Antony* is, however, to base it on a literary model. The image of Antony as the father of Christian monasticism is dependent less on the historical undertaking of Antony than on the literary success of the *Life of Antony*. The rhetorical intent and power of the *Vita* is still evident today in the centrality given to Antony in monastic history. The *Vita* itself, when proper attention is given to the details, rejects the originality of Antony's undertaking.<sup>31</sup> Before embarking himself on an ascetic career, Antony placed his orphaned sister with "known and trusted virgins." He then sought out an individual ascetic whom he might emulate and found one, an old man in a neighboring village, who had lived the ascetic life in solitude from his youth.<sup>32</sup> Precedents thus clearly existed for the young Antony, even according to the *Vita*. In addition in the *Vita*, one hears of monasteries in Egypt at the time, though they are reported to be few in number. While this reference to monasteries may be anachronistic, their mere mention indicates that the author had no intention of claiming Antony as the

30. *Vita Antonii* 49–51 (PG 26 914–19).

31. Heussi, *Ursprung*, 56–58.

32. *Vita Antonii* 3 (PG 26 843–846).



"originator" of the monastic enterprise. He is more concerned with Antony's subsequent fame which, by portraying Antony as staunchly anti-Arian, he uses to garnish monastic support for his own ecclesio-political position.<sup>33</sup> His goal is thus served by portraying Antony as famous and hence more visibly "orthodox."

A comparison of the *Life of Antony* with the letters of Antony and the sayings attributed to him in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* reveals the literary modeling of the Antony of the *Vita*. He bears only an indirect relationship to the historical Antony.<sup>34</sup> The image of Antony as the father of Christian monasticism is but a product of Antony's subsequent success multiplied in turn by the success of the *Vita*. This success, real and literary, may have added impetus to the monastic enterprise in Egypt and beyond, but it did not originate it. If the *Vita* had not been written, it is questionable whether greater claim would have been given to Antony's influence than to that of Macarios the Great (ca. 300–390 C.E.), Arsenios (ca. 354–412 C.E.), or Poemen (d. ca. 450 C.E.).<sup>35</sup> Athanasius, if indeed he wrote the *Vita*,<sup>36</sup> mentions Antony only once in his other writings. While Athanasius corresponded with various monks, we know of no correspondence with Antony. Antony's fame is the fame of the *Vita*.

### THE VILLAGE ASCETICS

When one sets Antony aside and turns instead to the "known and trusted virgins" with whom he left his sister and the old ascetic in the neighboring village whom he sought to emulate, another view of the origins of monastic development in Egypt begins to emerge.

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33. Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981) 131–59; but note the anti-Arian stance of the Antony of the letters. Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*, 44–45.

34. Dörries, "Die Vita Antonii"; Heussi, *Ursprung*, 78–108.

35. The thirty-eight sayings attributed to Antony in the alphabetical collection of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, while a fair number, do not set him apart numerically at least from a number of other famous monks in the collection. Forty-four sayings of Arsenios are recorded, 47 of John the Dwarf, 41 of Macarios the Great, 209 of Poemen, 54 of Sisoës, and 27 of Amma Syncletica.

36. Heussi, *Ursprung*, 78–86; Timothy D. Barnes, "Angel of Light or Mystic Initiate? The Problem of the *Life of Antony*," *JIS* 37 (1986) 353–68; Charles Kannengiesser, "St. Athanasius of Alexandria Rediscovered: His Political and Pastoral Achievement," *CCR* 9 (1988) 69–70.

Here one finds that withdrawal to the desert is not central; the persons involved remained within the village community. An ascetic life, whether practiced alone or in common with like-minded individuals, involved withdrawal from certain social patterns of human existence (family and sex), but not a physical separation from the community. That persons from his village followed Antony to his desert retreats and sought his presence might be interpreted to mean not that they wished to emulate him but that they felt cheated by his departure. In seeking solitude in the desert away from the village, he was taking with him the power of God made available to the village through his presence. The ascetic had a function in the village, and Antony's innovative departure called this function into question.

The existence of these village ascetics is confirmed from other sources. A party of visitors who traveled between Alexandria and Lycopolis in 394–95 C.E. on an excursion to visit various monks and monastic communities reports that in the Theban city of Oxyrhynchus "the monks were almost the majority over the secular inhabitants."<sup>37</sup> They observed that the old temples were bursting with monks and that no quarter of the city was free from them. They estimated the number within the walls at five thousand. While the details of the account are open to question, the active presence of monks within the city is apparent. These ascetics had not left to make the desert a city, but had remained to turn the city into a virtual monastery.<sup>38</sup>

A documentary papyrus from Egypt dated to June 324 C.E. and supplying the first known technical use of the term *μοναχός* for a Christian monk uses the term precisely to describe such a "city" or village ascetic.<sup>39</sup> In this brief document submitted to Dioscorus Caeso, the *praepositus pagi* of the region, Aurelius Isidorus, a private citizen of Karanis, filed a claim against Pamounis and Harpalus, whose cow destroyed his farming efforts and who assaulted him when he attempted to remove the animal from his field. In describing the assault, Isidorus claims that the two would have killed him

37. *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* 5; translation from Russell and Ward, *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 67.

38. Brown, *Body and Society*, 217.

39. Judge, "Earliest Use," 72–89. The term occurs in the *Gospel of Thomas* (36.4; 41.28; 46.12), though not in the later technical sense of "monk."

if not for the intervention of "the deacon Antoninus and the monk Isaac."

This monk, the earliest for whom direct nonliterary evidence is available, is not one who, in a quest for solitude, fled to the desert or mountains where he might avoid the encumbering affairs of the world. Isaac, as a μοναχός, remained an active member of the wider community. The simple inclusion of his title μοναχός in the petition, together with that of the deacon Antoninus, suggests that both the titles and the individuals were recognized in Karanis. The petitioner, Isidorus, undoubtedly hoped to add weight to his claim through his use of the titles.<sup>40</sup>

The monk (or μοναχός) Isaac represents a type of ascetic termed elsewhere an ἀποτακτικός. According to the documentary evidence, the apotactic movement played a significant role in early Christianity.<sup>41</sup> It is, however, summarily dismissed in the surviving literary sources. Jerome, who labeled such monks *remnuoth*,<sup>42</sup> repudiated them as reprobate or "false" monks in his famous letter to Eustochium. He reports that they live together in small groups within the cities, refuse to subordinate themselves to anyone, quarrel frequently, dress ostentatiously and sigh constantly for the effect, visit virgins, and disparage the clergy. He advises Eustochium to avoid them like the plague, while recommending to her the "true" monks who follow the anchoritic or coenobitic life.<sup>43</sup>

Jerome's vitriolic attack against such "city" monks is not unusual, though his vituperative skill is perhaps unmatched. His judgment against them is necessarily suspect. Their numbers were large. Jerome himself admits that they were the most numerous type of monk in his own province of Pannonia. His universal rejection of them undoubtedly has more to do with their unsubordinated power

40. Judge, "Earliest Use," 73–74.

41. Judge, "Earliest Use," 79–89.

42. The term *remnuoth* most likely means "a solitary." For a discussion of the meaning of the term and the parallel *Sarabaitae*, see Jürgen Horn, "Iria sunt in Aegypto genera monachorum: Die ägyptischen Bezeichnungen für die 'dritte Art' des Mönchtums bei Hieronymus und Johannes Cassianus," in Heike Behlmer, ed., *Festgabe für Wolfhart Westendorf zu seinem 70. Geburtstag* (Göttingen: Seminar für Ägyptologie und Koptologie, 1994) 63–82.

43. *Ep.* 22.34 (CSEL 54); F. A. Wright, *Select Letters of St Jerome* (LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933); Judge, "Earliest Use," 78–79.

and perhaps their theology than their corrupt manner of life. The latter is simply part of Jerome's attack against them.<sup>44</sup>

Within the city, monastic and clerical authorities clashed head-on, without the buffer of a desert or monastery wall. In another mainstream literary source, the *Letter of Ammon*, Ammon reports that his priest dismissed as heretical an Alexandrian monk with whom he first considered affiliating himself. The priest sent him instead up the Nile to the Pachomian community.<sup>45</sup> In the literary sources, which represent the successful ecclesiastical party, these "city" monks have lost the struggle for authority and have been dismissed. They are rejected as those who pervert the monastic life for their own gain and are unworthy, in Jerome's view, of even bearing the title of monk. The title is reserved for those who withdraw from the social world of the village and leave the village thereby under the authority of the clergy. The "true" monk lives in isolation or in a community behind a wall. The term *μοναχός* itself becomes limited in the literary sources to these later anchoritic and coenobitic forms of the ascetic life.<sup>46</sup>

In this literary success of the more easily controllable anchoritic and coenobitic forms of monasticism, the "city" monks or *remnuoth* are not only disparaged, but for the most part they are forgotten or ignored. Their significance for the formative stages of monastic history was thus lost. While the ecclesiastical rhetoric of Jerome and others that carried the day continues to affect the presentation of monastic history, the documentary evidence has begun to challenge their control of that history. The *remnuoth* or ἀποτακτικοί are reclaiming their rightful place. Judge, who wrote the definitive study on the apotactic movement, asserts that

we must posit an event, or change of fashion, different from and prior to the creation of either eremitism (in its Antonian form) or coenobitism, but perhaps close in time to them, and part of a swift series of developments that led to them. The apotactic movement (as later attested) meets this requirement. It represents the point at which the men at last followed the pattern long set for virgins and widows, and

44 This is not to suggest that corrupt monks did not exist in the cities, but only that such corruption was not determined by the monk's residence in the city

45 *Epistula Ammonis* 2; Goehring, *Letter of Ammon*, 124–25, 191

46 Judge, "Earliest Use," 78–79.

set up houses of their own in town, in which the life of personal renunciation and service in the church would be practiced.<sup>47</sup>

The true significance of the old village ascetic whom Antony encountered before his withdrawal to the desert now becomes clear. The ascetic, like Isaac, while setting himself apart from the normal pattern of human existence, remained within the community where he served as a source of inspiration and as a known conduit to the divine. It was not an accident that Antony turned to him. Given this understanding of the monk, Antony's subsequent innovation of withdrawal from the village broke the pattern. While in the long run the withdrawal pleased the ecclesiastical opponents like Jerome, one suspects that in the short run it was viewed by others as desertion. If all who chose the ascetic life fled to the desert, to whom would the villagers turn in time of need?

Documentary evidence likewise helps to explicate the role of the "known and trusted virgins" to whom Antony entrusted his young orphaned sister before he departed on his own ascetic career. A legal document dated to 400 C.E. records the lease of space on the ground floor and basement of a house owned by two natural sisters, Theodora and Tauris, μοναχαὶ ἀποτακτικαί.<sup>48</sup> While the precise role of these two sisters within the broader community is not given, their status as μοναχαὶ ἀποτακτικαί sets them apart, and their business transactions suggest their social power and prestige. Since the papyrus comes from Oxyrhynchus, it seems likely that Theodora and Tauris should be numbered among the twenty thousand virgins reported living in that city in the *History of the Monks in Egypt*. They outnumbered their male counterparts by two to one.<sup>49</sup>

Two letters from a woman named Didyme of the early fourth century offer tantalizing evidence of an organization of Christian women involved in the daily life of the surrounding community.<sup>50</sup> "Didyme and the sisters" participated in various commercial transactions that include lines of credit and the transfer of goods (grapes,

47. Judge, "Earliest Use," 85.

48. *P. Oxy.* 3203; Judge, "Earliest Use," 82; idem, "Fourth-Century Monasticism," 613.

49. *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* 5.6; Judge, "Earliest Use," 82–83.

50. *P. Berl. Inv.* 13897 and *P. Oxy.* 1774; Alanna Emmett, "The Nuns and the Ostrich Egg" (lecture).

sandals, cakes, a headband, and an ostrich egg). While it is not clear that their organization should be understood as a monastery in the later sense,<sup>51</sup> it does appear to fit an earlier form of Christian ascetic association in which flight from the world was not primary. Like the *μοναχός* Isaac, Didyme and the sisters mingle openly in the daily life of the wider Christian community. Their embracing of the "solitary" life does not preclude the using of their talents to help in diverse ways their brothers and sisters in the Lord.

The documentary evidence of these early female and male ascetic associations and roles suggests that Antony's innovation lay not in the idea of withdrawal *per se*, but in its translation from an ethical to a physical plane. Theodora, Tauris, and Isaac withdrew from the traditional ethical patterns of the family, but not from the social and indeed commercial interactions of the Christian community. They chose a solitary life in place of family and children and viewed it as an opportunity to increase their service to the Lord through their service to their fellow Christians. Antony expanded this concept of withdrawal to include a physical separation from one's fellow Christians through flight to ever more remote retreats.<sup>52</sup>

A careful reading of the *Life of Antony* reveals that he took time to develop this idea and put it into effect. Judge notes that the term *μοναχός* appears for the first time in the *Vita* precisely at the moment Antony terminated his self-imposed solitude. It was only then that he "became the centre of public excitement and began to constitute a social movement."<sup>53</sup> Thus even in this most literary of monastic sources, the term *monk* is linked first to a socially active undertaking rather than to a withdrawal from society. Eventually Antony did outgrow this "social movement" (and with it the original meaning of *μοναχός*) and withdrew to a distant mountain retreat where he spent the rest of his life, some forty-three years, as a true hermit.

Not all followed Antony in his decision to withdraw further and to abandon his newly created social movement. Some chose to re-

51. Emmett, "Nuns," 4–5; P. Barison, "Ricerche sui monasteri dell'Egitto bizantino ed arabo secondo i documenti dei papiri greci," *Aeg* 18 (1938) 138.

52. It is not clear to this author whether this innovation is that of the historical Antony or more likely presented as such by his biographer.

53. *Vita Antonii* 14 (PG 26 863–866); Judge, "Earliest Use," 77. Judge suggests that the monk Isaac may have been influenced by Antony's efforts, since Karanis was but a day's walk from the center of Antony's activities.

main closer to home in and around the villages. To judge from the accounts of papyri from Oxyrhynchus and Jerome's *remnuoth*,<sup>54</sup> their numbers were large. Some eventually found an ordered existence in the coenobitic innovations of monks like Pachomius.<sup>55</sup> Others either filtered into developing ecclesiastical structures under the control of the clergy or came under the opprobrium of church officials like Jerome. In either case, as witnesses to a third form of the monastic life, they disappeared from the scene and were forgotten. While more original historically than either the anchoritic ideal of Antony or the coenobitic innovation of Pachomius, the apotactic movement was supplanted by these later developments and forgotten. The original significance of the term *μοναχός* was lost. In its new meaning of physical withdrawal, Antony, as portrayed in the *Vita*, became its first exemplar. Having left the apotactic movement behind literarily, it was a short step to see Antony as the first monk and his innovation as the origin of monasticism.

### PACHOMIUS AND THE COENOBITES

The story is much the same with respect to the understanding of coenobitic monasticism as an innovation of the Upper Egyptian figure of Pachomius. It has already been suggested that it arose in Egypt as one of two developments from the earlier apotactic movement. When the latter came under disrepute, the successful movement begun by Pachomius in Upper Egypt came to be associated with the origin of coenobitic monasticism much as Antony had come to be associated with the origin of anchoritic monasticism. It was again to a significant degree the success of the *Pachomian Rule* and the *Life of Pachomius*,<sup>56</sup> both of which had gained wide distribu-

54. See above discussion.

55. Judge, "Earliest Use," 78.

56. The *Life of Pachomius* survives in various Coptic, Greek, Arabic, and Latin versions, the interrelatedness of which is complex. For an account of the issues see Goehring, *Letter of Ammon*, 3–23, and Rousseau, *Ascetics*, 243–47. The text of the Bohairic version of the *Vita* (Bo) is found in Lefort, *S. Pachomii vita bohairice scripta*. The Sahidic versions are found in Lefort, *S. Pachomii vitae sahidice scriptae*. The Greek versions (including the *Vita prima*=G1) are located in Halkin, *Sancti Pachomii Vitae Graecae*. The *Rule*, which survives in Coptic and Greek fragments, was translated into Latin and circulated by Jerome (see Boon, *Pachomiana latina*). English translations of all the major texts within the Pachomian corpus are found in Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*.

tion through their translation into Greek and Latin, that accounted for the assumed preeminence of Pachomius.

The *Vita* reports that Pachomius converted to Christianity at about age twenty. As a conscript into the Roman army, he had been housed in prison to await movement toward the front. It was in prison that he first met Christians, who impressed him by the compassion they showed toward him and his fellow conscripts. He promised to convert if he should be freed, and upon his release, he was baptized and undertook an ascetic life as an anchorite under the tutelage of Palamon, a famous ascetic living near the village of Šeneset (Chenoboskion) in Upper Egypt.<sup>57</sup> The ascetic demands were hard, but Pachomius proved capable.

His coenobitic innovation came as the result of a vision. While gathering wood at the deserted village of Tabennese, he was instructed to remain there and build a monastery. After consulting with Palamon, he undertook the task imposed upon him by the vision. Soon many came to join in his new communal experiment.<sup>58</sup> In time the numbers became too large for the original establishment at Tabennese, and a second monastery was constructed at the deserted village of Pbow. This second monastery soon functioned as the center of a growing system of monastic settlements scattered along the Nile in Upper Egypt. The *koinonia*, as it came to be known, served not only a spiritual need, but invigorated the economy of the area.<sup>59</sup> By the time of Pachomius's death in 346 C.E., his *koinonia* numbered some nine monasteries and two affiliated women's houses. Their organization was governed by a common *Rule*, which soon came to be used by coenobitic establishments beyond his organizational control. This development led to the designation of any monastery that used the Pachomian *Rule* as Tabennesiote, which in turn translated, often incorrectly, into the community's Pachomian origin.<sup>60</sup>

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A Greek version of the *Life of Pachomius* was taken to the Alexandrian archbishop Theophilus around 400 C.E., from where we can surmise it spread. Crum, *Papyruscodex*, 12–13; Lefort, *Vies coptes*, 389–90.

57. Bo 7–10; G1 4–6.

58. Bo 17–26; G1 12–24.

59. Goehring, "World Engaged" (chap. 2 in the present volume).

60. James E. Goehring, "Chalcedonian Power Politics and the Demise of Pachomian Monasticism" (OP 15; Claremont, Calif.: Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, 1989) 17–18 (see pp. 258–59 in the present volume).



The picture of Pachomius's originality is, however, literary rather than historical. According to the *Life of Pachomius* itself, at least three of the original nine monasteries were not founded by the Pachomians but elected to join the Pachomian system. They clearly had an independent origin. There is no indication how long the monastery at Šeneset existed prior to its decision to affiliate itself with the Pachomian *koinonia*. It is simply reported that it had existed previously under an old ascetic named Ebonh. The monastery of Tmoušons, the fourth to join the Pachomian system, likewise had an earlier independent existence,<sup>61</sup> as did the monastery of Tbewe, which had been founded previously by a certain Petronios. The latter had withdrawn from his parent's home and gathered like-minded individuals around him who wanted to live in Christ. It was only then that he heard of the Pachomian *koinonia* and wrote to Pachomius asking that his monastery be accepted into the system. Tbewe thus became a Pachomian monastery. The *Vita* makes clear through these stories that Pachomius's innovation had little to do with the coenobitic institution itself. It was rather the organizational principle of a *koinonia* or system of affiliated coenobitic monasteries and the development of a monastic rule that are credited to Pachomius.<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, it is certain that not all coenobitic communities chose to join his *koinonia*. When Theodore, Pachomius's most significant successor as general abbot, joined the movement in its early years, he transferred from an existing monastery further down the Nile.<sup>63</sup> There is no indication that Theodore's original community ever desired to join the Pachomian system. Likewise, while Shenoute appreciated Pachomius's undertaking and borrowed from his rule, his monasteries had an independent origin and followed their own pattern of development.<sup>64</sup> Melitian and Manichaeian communities also remained outside the Pachomian fold.<sup>65</sup>

61. Bo 50–55; G1 54.

62. The organizational principle may be dependent in part on the temple hierarchy and organization in Egypt. Ruppert, *Das pachomianische Mönchtum*, 324–26. Manichaeian precedents must also be considered (above, n. 5).

63. Bo 29–32; G1 33–35. Goehring, "Theodore's Entry."

64. Leipoldt, *Schenute von Atripe*, 34–39; Hans Quecke, "Ein Pachomiuszitat bei Shenute," in Peter Nagel, ed., *Probleme der koptischen Literatur* (Halle: Martin Luther Universität, 1968) 155–71.

65. On the Manichaeians see Stroumsa, "Manichaeian Challenge," 307–19, and

The theory of a Pachomian origin of coenobitic monasticism must thus be discarded. Attempts to explain his insight through the borrowing of earlier communal experiences or experiments fall into the same trap insofar as they seek to trace the coenobitic development back to a single root. The theory that his efforts to organize disparate monks into a systematic community was a result of his experience in the army, would, if it could be maintained, only account for Pachomius's effort and not those of the surrounding communities that joined his system.<sup>66</sup> While the influence of Egyptian temple organization on his *koinonia* is clearer, once again it helps to explain his particular plans, but hardly the "origin" of coenobitic monasticism.<sup>67</sup>

More recently the early presence of Manichaean missionaries in Egypt has offered a possible source of influence for Pachomius's innovation.<sup>68</sup> While their communities existed earlier, there is no direct evidence of their influence on Pachomius. He might as well have heard of Philo's Therapeutae. Furthermore, even if Pachomius had been directly influenced by the Manichaean movement organizationally, it does not establish a single Manichaean origin of coenobitic monasticism. The vast number of monasteries in Egypt in the late Byzantine era simply cannot be traced to a single point of origin. Archaeological evidence from Deir el-Bala'izah suggests, for example, a monastery structure somewhere between the semi-eremitic communities of the Wadi Natrun and the fully coenobitic establishments of Pachomius. Its unique organizational pattern argues against a Pachomian source of inspiration.<sup>69</sup> Finally, it can be noted that when Justinian forced a Chalcedonian abbot on the Pachomian commu-

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above, n 5 On the Melitians, note Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt*, 38–99, and chap 9 in the present volume.

66. Chitty, *Desert a City*, 22; Leonard Lesko, "Monasticism in Egypt," in Florence D. Friedman, ed., *Beyond the Pharaohs: Egypt and the Copts in the 2nd to 7th Centuries A.D.* (Providence: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 1989) 46. It seems unlikely that Pachomius's brief sojourn in the army as a conscript, probably against his will, would have influenced him in the positive direction of modeling his community on the experience.

67. Ruppert, *Das pachomianische Mönchtum*, 324–26.

68. See above, nn. 5 and 65.

69. Peter Grossmann, "Die Unterkunftsbauten des Koinobitenklosters 'Dair al-Balayza' im Vergleich mit den Eremitagen der Mönche von Kellia," in *Le site monastique copte des Kellia: Sources historiques et explorations archéologiques Actes du Colloque de Genève, 13 au 15 août 1984* (Geneva: Mission suisse d'archéologie copte de l'Université de Genève, 1986).

nity at Pbow, many monks fled to other existing monasteries. That such monasteries existed untouched by Justinian's efforts against the Pachomian *koinonia* argues for their independence from it.<sup>70</sup>

The possible influence of the Manichaean movement on Pachomius raises the point of the actual theological nature of the movement. While the surviving literary sources portray it as in close agreement with the mainstream Christian forces exemplified by Athanasius (ca. 296–373 C.E.), increasing evidence suggests that such careful theological concern and definition is anachronistic, a product of the time when the sources were composed and edited rather than of the historical period they purport to describe. Two major manuscript discoveries made near the Pachomian monastery of Pbow raise the question of their origin within the Pachomian system. The Dishna Papers, which include the Bodmer Papyri, include copies of letters from the early Pachomian abbots. This evidence has led James Robinson to claim that the contents of this manuscript hoard represent the remains of a Pachomian library.<sup>71</sup> If true, these contents reveal much about the breadth of Pachomian intellectual activity. As one would expect, biblical texts predominate; but one finds as well apocryphal material, classical texts (including a satyr play), mathematical exercises, tax receipts, and a Greek grammar. While some of this material may have entered the community in the belongings of new members, there appears to have been no effort to weed it out.

The second manuscript collection, the Nag Hammadi Codices, offers an even more startling possibility. This collection preserves a significant number of heterodox texts, many of which are Gnostic in origin and most of which would have been rejected by the Athanasian party. The question of a Pachomian origin and use of these codices has been much debated, and no clear consensus has emerged.<sup>72</sup> That the idea remains a real possibility in itself under-

70. Goehring, "Chalcedonian Power Politics" (chap. 12 in the present volume).

71. James M. Robinson, "Reconstructing the First Christian Monastic Library," paper presented at the Smithsonian Institution Libraries, Washington, D.C., September 15, 1986; idem, "The Story of the Bodmer Papyri: The First Christian Monastery Library" (unpublished manuscript).

72. For the basics of the debate and further bibliography on it, see Goehring, "New Frontiers," 247–52 (pp. 173–79 in the present volume), and Veilleux, "Monasticism and Gnosis"; also Robert A. Kraft and Janet A. Timbie, review of *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, by James M. Robinson, *RSR* 8 (1982) 34–35.

scores a changing view of Pachomian monasticism and its origins. The literary accounts of Pachomian history are no longer assumed to be an accurate reflection of early Pachomian theological concern. They were written to edify future monks and not to record an accurate history for modern scholars. It may well be that the early Pachomians defined their Christianity in terms of their ascetic practice and not in terms of the books they read.<sup>73</sup>

In the case of monastic origins in Egypt, often presumed to be the source of monastic origins in general, the evidence has revealed a complex situation. The image of Antony and Pachomius as respectively the fathers of anchoritic and coenobitic monasticism is a fiction that grows out of and beyond the depiction of these two figures in the literary sources. While both were influential, their insights were at best innovations and not creations. Antony represents an expansion of the monastic concept of withdrawal from its original ethical plane to include a physical dimension. He withdrew not only from the domestic bonds of family and marriage, but from the social bonds of the village in general. Likewise Pachomius's innovation was not the coenobitic lifestyle itself, but the organization of an affiliate group of monasteries under a common rule. His central monastery of Pbow functioned for the affiliate monasteries in Upper Egypt much as Cluny functioned for its affiliate monasteries in medieval Europe. Both were systems that created fame and power. Neither created it *ex nihilo*, but drew on previously existing coenobitic institutions.

The evidence of the apotactic movement certainly expands our understanding of ascetic practice in Egypt before the appearance of Antony and Pachomius. But it would be wrong to conclude that we are now closer to the "origins" of monasticism. The apotactic movement should not serve simply as the "missing link" between early ascetic practices within the home and the later institutionalized forms. Rather it underscores the complexity of the situation, not only in its historical reality, but particularly in the manner in which it has come down to us in the surviving sources. Not only is the available evidence limited, it has been clearly filtered so as to conform with prevailing opinion. The apotactic monk who resided in

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73. Chadwick, "Pachomios," 17-19; idem, "Domestication of Gnosis," 14-16; Goehring, "New Frontiers," 240-52 (see pp. 166-79 in the present volume).

the village and participated in its social and ecclesiastical affairs was forgotten, or rather repudiated by a later Christianity that had embraced less politically active forms of asceticism. Desert hermits and "imprisoned" coenobites offered a less direct challenge to ecclesiastical and political authority and therefore flourish in the literature that survives, a literature that survives precisely because it represents that ecclesiastical and political authority. The motive behind the silence with respect to the apotactic movement is thus political, and a history of monastic development must take this into account.

### EGYPT AND SYRIA

The complexity of the situation in Egypt is repeated throughout the early Christian world. As the biases of the sources and the earlier selective use of them are taken more and more into account, the diverse origins of monastic practice and its meaning become increasingly clear. Thus the old theory that traced the monastic impulse in all corners of the empire back to an original Egyptian inspiration has proven to be a literary fiction. It too was dependent on a Western quest for origins and a Hellenocentric view of the ancient Mediterranean world perpetuated by selective use of the sources and their interpretation.

If one depends chiefly on the *Religious History* of Theodoret of Cyrillus (ca. 393–458 C.E.) for an understanding of Syriac monasticism, for example, one cannot help but have a view filtered through Theodoret's selection of the evidence and his adopted Hellenism. To begin with, his evidence is limited by the date of his composition, circa mid-fifth century C.E. Theodoret knows of individual monks who flourished in the mid-fourth century and of coenobitic institutions founded at the same time, but the preponderance of his evidence dates nearer his own time in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. This compares to a late-third-century date for Antony (ca. 251–356 C.E.) and an early-fourth-century date for Pachomius (ca. 290–346 C.E.). Given such a database, one might easily conclude that Syriac monasticism was at least later in date if not directly influenced by Egyptian monasticism.<sup>74</sup>

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74. Price, *History*, xix.

Even should the monastic enterprise in Syria prove temporally later in date than its Egyptian counterpart, however, its distinct practices, spirituality, and organization betray its independent origins. The Semitic roots of Syriac-speaking Christianity are clear, and these roots give Syrian spirituality a distinctive flavor unencumbered by the Hellenistic influences of classical Greece and Rome.<sup>75</sup> The Syrian ascetic embarked on a monastic career not to punish or subdue the flesh but to offer the body as a symbol of the faith. The body was not viewed dualistically in opposition to the spirit but as that portion of the person through which the faith might be acted out and become visible.<sup>76</sup> The Syriac monk simply cannot be understood through recourse to the Hellenistic dualism between the spirit and the flesh. While the latter informed Egyptian monastic practice, it ran counter to the purpose of the Syrian ascete.

If one depends on Theodoret of Cyrrhus, however, one receives just such a Hellenistic image of the Syrian monk. In Theodoret's rendition of the life of Simeon the Stylite (ca. 390–459 C.E.), his ascetic practices are viewed as evidence of his consummate philosophy.<sup>77</sup> His physical discipline has as its purpose the desire to align his body with the higher purpose of his soul. The influence of the Platonic dualism between spirit and flesh is apparent in Theodoret's report that Simeon ascended his pillar in order "to fly heavenward and to leave the earthly life."<sup>78</sup> The description of this ascetic life as philosophic unites Theodoret with Eusebius of Caesarea. In Ashbrook Harvey's words,

For all their differences, Theodoret's *Life of Simeon* represents a harmonious tradition with the fourth-century *Life of Antony* of Egypt, and indeed with Eusebius of Caesarea's philosopher martyrs. It is Simeon's acquired dispassion that Theodoret is celebrating. Like

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75. Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women*, 4–12; R. Murray, "The Characteristics of the Earliest Syriac Christianity," in N. Garsoian, T. Mathews, and R. Thomson, eds., *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982) 3–16.

76. "The religious image and the physical action are inseparable and witness to the making literal of the symbol." Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women*, 9.

77. The following discussion of Simeon and the varied interpretations of his life is dependent on the work of Susan Ashbrook Harvey ("Sense of a Stylite")

78. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia religiosa* 26.12; Harvey, "Sense of a Stylite," 379.

Antony, Simeon had first to gain that self-control before achieving the spiritual strength necessary to perform God's work.<sup>79</sup>

Given such a source, it is little wonder that a dependent relationship could be found between the Egyptian and Syriac monasticism. But the Hellenistic veneer is apparent as soon as one compares it with the Syriac *Vita*. Here Simeon's actions are understood in the context of the Hebrew prophets, who not only proclaimed God's word, but acted it out.<sup>80</sup> Simeon ascends his pillar not to flee the earthly life, but to serve as a dramatic statement (literal symbol) of the gospel.

Simeon became a stylite, then, not in penitence, not to deny his body nor to discipline it, but because through it he could fulfill God's purpose. By public witness of his actions — the prophecy of behavior — he could efficaciously proclaim God's word.<sup>81</sup>

The distinctive nature of the Syrian monastic enterprise is clear. The view that it was theoretically akin to its Egyptian counterpart derived from the uncritical use of selected sources, sources that had themselves already translated the Syriac data into a Hellenized form.

If the beginnings of asceticism had a separate origin in Syria, so too did the later forms of Syrian asceticism develop independently. As the Egyptian anchorites can no longer serve as forerunners of the Syrian hermits, neither can Egyptian coenobitism serve to explain the north Syrian monasteries. Archaeology has shown the distinctiveness of the latter with their greater open space and absence of an enclosing wall.<sup>82</sup> Strong Marcionite and Manichaean presences in Syria<sup>83</sup> might have offered precedents, but as in the case of Egypt, the connection is not clear. What is clear is that Syrian monastic origins lay not in Egypt.

The more we learn of early Christian monasticism the more we discover its complexity. While the French proverb, *Il n'y a que les*

79. Harvey, "Sense of a Stylite," 380.

80. Harvey, "Sense of a Stylite," 382.

81. Harvey, "Sense of a Stylite," 382–83.

82. Jean Lassus, *Sanctuaires chrétiens de Syrie: Essai sur la genèse, la form et l'usage liturgie des édifices du culte chrétien en Syrie, du III<sup>e</sup> siècle à la conquête musulmane* (Paris: Geuthner, 1947) 272–73; G. Tchalenko, *Villages antiques de la Syrie du Nord: Le massif du Bélus à l'époque romaine* (3 vols.; Paris: Geuthner, 1953–59) 1:19; Price, *History*, xix–xx.

83. Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women*, 7; Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, trans. Robert A. Kraft et al (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971) 1–43.

*détails qui comptent* (Only the details are really important), may overstate the case, it is fair to say that simplified theories of monastic origins that ignore the details have proven invalid. They were born of that quest for origins with which Western historiography has so long been enamored. But as Eliade points out, "Western man's longing for 'origins' and the 'primordial' forced him finally into an encounter with history";<sup>84</sup> it forced him to consider the details, and the details have dissuaded him from the quest.

The monastic sources themselves almost universally agree in placing the origins of monasticism in divine inspiration. Antony and Simeon responded to hearing the gospel, and Pachomius was given a vision. While one may choose to discredit the supernatural nature of this explanation, it shares with the evidence the sense of asceticism as bursting forth simultaneously in myriad places. The "big bang" lies not in one or more historical events, but deep beneath the historical plane of ancient Mediterranean culture. It was the spirit of the times and the new Christian faith that produced the explosion, and as it welled forth from below, it burst onto the plane of history independently throughout the empire. One may still discover influences on specific forms of asceticism and trace various paths of development, but the quest for the "origins" of Christian monasticism should be let go.

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84 Eliade, "Quest," 50.